

Why should we bother to have fun at work?

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(EDITOR'S NOTE: Business communications has never been more complicated - Cell phones, video conferencing, e-mails, web content, correspondence, reports and presentations cause even the greatest writer or orator to stir with apprehension that their message is clearly understood. Each month this column will explore the many different ways each of us can learn to communicate more plainly.)

As I was trying to brainstorm a topic for this month's communication column, I stumbled upon a couple of interesting articles on the Internet about the benefits of having fun at work. Then I remembered the FISH! training that is being given at KDHE and thought I'd investigate one of the FISH! components a bit more - creating "fun" in the workplace.

If you have been through training, how did your office respond when your group was asked to try to incorporate more "fun" into your day? The Office of Communication was asked this question and to be honest....we were somewhat baffled and had a difficult time coming up with ideas! This does not mean we don't want to have fun. All I am saying is that we have been so serious for so long that switching gears and trying to remember how to be "fun" was a bit challenging for our group. I am happy to report we are working on getting better at this. It may take some practice though.

I found some compelling information that bodes well for having fun at work:

- We spend 40 hours (at least) a week at work, or 1,840 hours a year. That's 86,840 hours in a working life---give or take a few. *For anyone that is counting....that's a LONG time to not be having any fun.*
- Children laugh about 400 times a day. By the time people reach age 35, they only laugh about 15 times a day.
- People smile only 35 percent as often as they think they do.
- When you laugh, you burn 3.5 calories.
- Laughter releases endorphins, a feel-good chemical in the body that has the same positive effects of strenuous exercise.
- Laughter boosts oxygen intake and helps replenish cells.
- Laughter increases our tolerance for pain, promotes immunity and reduces stress.

Clearly, one of the most compelling reasons for having fun is that it's HEALTHY! *We are, after all, the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, right?* Need a few more reasons? It's especially important in the workplace because it brings people together and helps build trust, encourages openness and fosters risk-taking and creativity. It also combats job boredom and fatigue. Laughter also reduces conflict and tension.

Keeping all of this in mind, give yourselves permission to plan a fun activity---order in pizza, go out for lunch, take an afternoon ice cream break---and make that your planning meeting for creating more fun at work.